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Experimental Investigations of Granular Matter Flow Regimes leading to Insight into Lahar Flow Dynamics

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Abstract

The flow of granular material governs numerous natural processes including the aeolian dynamics of sand dune formation, sub-aerial and submarine mass flows, the collective dynamics of ice blocks floating on the ocean, avalanches of debris and snow, as well as volcanic granular-fluid flow processes, such as pyroclastic density currents, volcanogenic debris flows and lahars.

Lahars are a particularly important type of granular flow, in regards to its possible effect on human life; they are debris and water-based flows, initiated by volcanic processes. A fascinating aspect about granular matter is the co-existence of behaviour similar to two or all three of the classical states of matter (solid, liquid, gas) and their frequent transitions between these behaviours. Despite the ubiquity of these transitions in nature and industry, the fundamental physics of granular matter remains a mystery, to the extent that a unified theory to describe the motion and behaviour of granular matter is still absent.

This study is an attempt to simulate lahars and their erosion/deposition mechanics in the laboratory by making use of a rotating drum. A rotating drum can be treated as an analogue for a lahar because it allows for erosion and deposition to occur as an active region of material flows over a passive, erodible bed. In nature these processes are transitory and highly dynamic, but an experimental analogue allows for the processes to be observed in a steady system.

Results include detailed maps of the various regions in a flowing granular material cor-

related to the speed of rotation of the flows. The changing status of the active and passive regions allows for measurements of the erosion mechanics within the drum. Also, potentially identified are two new phenomena; high speed rotations appear to include features similar to Kelvin-Helmholtz instabilities, and enclosed regions of sub-rotation, which are referred to as self-enclosed circulation cells (SECCs).

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Apologies to anyone who feels they should be listed here but aren't - your omission was not intentional, and should be seen as a reflection of my poor memory, rather than your lack of contribution.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and effort and that it has not been submitted anywhere for any award. Where other sources of information have been used, they have been acknowledged.

Adam Neather, August 2, 2017

Jim Jones

Shane Cronin

Gert Lube

"One can scoop up poppy seeds with a ladle as easily as if they were water and, when dipping the ladle, the seeds flow in a continuous stream."

- Titus Lucretius Carus, ca. 90 to 55 BCE

Quoted in Sands, Powders, and Grains: An Introduction to the Physics of Granular Materials (Springer, New York, 2000) by D. Jacques.

"If you sneeze into it, and it goes everywhere, then it's a powder."

- Dr. Marco Brenna, 28th November 2012

Quoted at the Geological Society of New Zealand annual conference BBQ.

Contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	Overview	2
1.1.1	Granular Material Behaviour	2
1.2	Summary and Aims	5
1.2.1	Research Approach	6
1.2.2	Controlling Erosion and Deposition	7
2	Literature Review	9
2.1	Overview	10
2.2	Introduction	11
2.2.1	Lahars	11
2.2.2	Lahar Composition	12
2.3	Dangers	14
2.3.1	Specific Cases	15
2.3.2	Danger Mitigation	16
2.4	Debris Flows	18
2.5	Difficulties when Studying Lahars	19
2.6	Analogue Experiments	20
2.6.1	Rotating Drums	21
2.6.2	Methods of Non-invasive Interrogation	23
2.7	Mathematical Descriptions and Modelling	27
2.7.1	The Inertial Number, I	28
2.7.2	Empirical Relationships	29
2.7.3	The Discrete Element Method (DEM)	30

2.7.4	Other Models for Describing Granular Materials	33
2.8	Summary	33
2.8.1	Research Question	34
3	Experimental Methodology	35
3.1	Experimental Overview	36
3.2	Equipment	38
3.2.1	Rotating Drum	38
3.2.2	Annular Shear Cell	41
3.2.3	Video Analysis Computer	46
3.3	Materials - The Ideal Particulates	48
3.4	Experimental Methodology	53
3.4.1	General Concerns	53
3.4.2	Granular Material Characterisation	54
3.4.3	Introductory Experiments	59
3.4.4	Intermediate Experiments	60
3.4.5	Advanced Experiments	63
4	Analytical Methodology	67
4.1	Introduction	68
4.2	PIV - Particle Image Velocimetry	68
4.2.1	Image Skew Problem and Solution	70
4.3	Automated Layer Thickness Analysis	70
4.3.1	Area of Active and Passive Regions	71
4.3.2	The Centre of Mass/Dynamic Angle of Friction	72
4.4	Mohr-Coulomb Circle Analysis	73
4.4.1	Finding the flow function	77
4.4.2	Internal Friction, Flow Factor, and Cohesiveness	84
4.5	Dimensionless Numbers	85
5	Results I - Dry Volcanic Ash under Constant Velocities	89

5.1	Introduction	90
5.1.1	Internal Structure	91
5.2	Flow Description as a Function of Drum Rotational Velocity	92
5.2.1	Active Region Fraction	97
5.2.2	Velocity Profiles	98
5.2.3	Avalanche Velocity Profiles	99
5.2.4	Area of Passive and Active Regions	100
5.2.5	Collapse Events	101
5.2.6	The Dynamic Angle of Friction	102
5.3	Measurements of a Passing Avalanche	103
5.4	Discussion	103
5.4.1	Active Region Fraction	104
5.4.2	Dynamic Angles of Friction	106
5.4.3	Collapse Periodicity	107
5.4.4	The Effect of a Passing Avalanche	108
5.4.5	The Mechanical Limit	109
6	Results II - Acceleration and New Phenomena	111
6.1	Introduction	112
6.2	Dynamic Equivalents	112
6.2.1	Layer Fractions	113
6.2.2	Dynamic Angle	113
6.3	New Phenomena	114
6.3.1	Self-Enclosed Circulation Cells	116
6.3.2	Kelvin-Helmholtz Instabilities	117
6.4	Discussion	120
6.4.1	Layer Thicknesses	120
6.4.2	Dynamic Angle	120
6.4.3	SECC Behaviour	121
6.4.4	KHI Behaviour	124

6.4.5	Implications for Natural Flows	125
7	Results III - Cross-Material Comparisons	129
7.1	Introduction	130
7.2	Observation Summary: by Phenomenon	131
7.3	Measured Variables	135
7.3.1	Example Velocity Profiles	136
7.3.2	Avalanche Velocity Profiles	136
7.3.3	Layer Thicknesses	137
7.3.4	Area of Passive and Active Regions	137
7.3.5	Collapse Periodicity	139
7.3.6	Dynamic Angle of Friction	140
7.4	Passing Avalanche	140
7.5	Mass Flux	141
7.6	Discussion	142
7.6.1	Qualitative Observations	142
7.6.2	Active Region Fraction	144
7.6.3	Dynamic Angles of Friction	146
7.6.4	Collapse Periodicity	147
7.6.5	Passing Avalanche	148
7.6.6	Pumice Radial Stripes	148
7.6.7	Implications for Natural Flows	154
8	Results IV - Wet Materials under Constant Velocities	157
8.1	Introduction	158
8.2	Wet Experiment Equivalents	158
8.3	Observation of the Varied Water Fill Level Experiments	159
8.3.1	Low Water Content	160
8.3.2	Mid-level Water Content	162
8.3.3	Full Drum	162

8.4	Temporary Centrifuging	164
8.5	Discussion	167
9	Discussion	169
9.1	Restatement of Aims	170
9.2	Consideration of Material Behaviour	170
9.2.1	Overview	171
9.2.2	Flow Regimes	172
9.2.3	Collapse Periodicity	174
9.2.4	Dynamic Angle of Friction	175
9.2.5	Material Dilation	176
9.2.6	Mass Flux	177
9.2.7	Temporary Centrifuging	177
9.2.8	Differences Between Materials	178
9.2.9	Changes in Behaviour with Interstitial Fluid	180
9.3	Relating Findings to Natural Flows	181
9.3.1	Clean Water Region Analogue	182
9.3.2	Implications for Hazard Planning	183
9.4	New Phenomena	184
9.4.1	Kelvin-Helmholtz Instabilities	185
9.4.2	Self-Enclosed Circulation Cells	186
9.4.3	Counter-Rotational Zones	187
9.5	Unsuitability of Hydrodynamic Models	188
9.6	Difficulties and Limitations	193
9.6.1	Difficulties	193
9.6.2	Limitations	198
9.7	Addressing the Aims	199
10	Conclusions	201
10.1	Summary	202

10.2	Broader Implications	202
10.3	Implications for Lahars	203
10.4	Future Directions	205
10.4.1	Water-based Experiments	206
10.4.2	Other Fluids	206
10.4.3	Deceleration	207
10.4.4	Torque Measurements	207
10.5	Synopsis	207
References		211
A	Observations by Velocity	249
A.1	Introduction	250
A.2	Ash	250
A.3	Beach Sand	252
A.4	Pumice	254
A.5	Millet	258
B	Pumice Jet Streams	261
B.1	Introduction	262
C	Nomenclature	265
C.1	Introduction	266
C.2	Nomenclature	266
C.2.1	Roman	266
C.2.2	Greek	267
C.3	Glossary	268
D	Source Code	271
D.1	Introduction	272
D.2	MATLAB PIV Analysis Code	272
D.2.1	License	272

D.3	C# Acceleration Code	273
D.3.1	License	273
E	Open Source Software	275
E.1	Introduction	276
E.1.1	Software Used	276

List of Figures

2.2.1	Cross-section of a typical lahar.	13
2.2.2	Types of flow behaviour.	13
2.3.1	Aftermath - Nevado del Ruiz.	17
2.3.2	A sabo dam.	18
2.6.1	Typical rotating drum structure.	22
2.7.1	Spring and dashpot.	31
3.1.1	Rolling regimes.	37
3.2.1	Lighting rig.	42
3.2.2	The annular shear cell.	45
3.2.3	Critical consolidation.	46
3.4.1	The ϕ scale.	56
3.4.2	Size distributions.	57
3.4.3	Acceleration verification 1.	61
3.4.4	Acceleration verification 2.	62
3.4.5	Target acceleration profile.	65
4.3.1	Example of image skew problem.	73
4.3.2	Finding the area of layers.	74
4.3.3	Code demonstration.	75

4.4.1	Mohr-Coulomb circles.	76
4.4.2	A family of internal yield loci.	77
4.4.3	Internal yield loci for the ash.	78
4.4.4	Internal yield loci for the beach sand.	79
4.4.5	The left-hand Mohr-Coulomb circle.	80
4.4.6	The right-hand Mohr-Coulomb circle.	81
4.4.7	Simplified right-hand Mohr-Coulomb circle.	82
4.4.8	Major versus unconfined stresses.	84
4.4.9	Ash flow function	85
4.4.10	Beach flow function	86
4.4.11	Static angle of internal friction and cohesion.	87
4.4.12	Static angle of internal friction and cohesion.	87
5.1.1	Ash observation summary.	92
5.2.1	The designations given to the various layers.	94
5.2.2	Layer structure diagrams	95
5.2.3	Key stages in the life time of an avalanche.	96
5.2.4	Dimensionless layer thicknesses - ash.	97
5.2.5	Ash velocity profiles.	98
5.2.6	Ash avalanche velocity profiles (9.375 RPM).	100
5.2.7	Ash avalanche velocity profiles (15 RPM).	101
5.2.8	Ash avalanche velocity profiles (21.875 RPM).	102
5.2.9	Areas of the ash.	103
5.2.10	Illustration of collapse event.	104
5.2.11	Collapse periodicity versus RPM (ash).	105
5.2.12	The dynamic angle of friction.	106
5.2.13	Dynamic angle of ash.	107
5.3.1	Passing avalanches in ash.	108
6.2.1	Dimensionless layer thicknesses - accelerating ash.	113

6.2.2	Dynamic angle of accelerating ash.	114
6.3.1	SECC velocity profile 1.	117
6.3.2	SECC velocity profile 2.	118
6.3.3	SECC velocity profile 3.	119
6.3.4	Rotational velocity versus SECC area.	120
6.3.5	Illustration of a single KHI event.	122
6.3.6	Still frames of KHI event.	123
6.3.7	KHI observation - propagation velocity.	124
6.3.8	KHI observation - area.	125
6.3.9	KHI observation - size ratio.	126
6.3.10	KHI frequency.	127
7.2.1	Observation summary.	132
7.2.2	Curvature example.	134
7.2.3	Low-density region example.	134
7.2.4	Inflection example.	135
7.3.1	Ash velocity profiles.	136
7.3.2	Beach sand velocity profiles.	137
7.3.3	Ash avalanche velocity profiles (9.375 RPM).	138
7.3.4	Ash avalanche velocity profiles (15 RPM).	139
7.3.5	Ash avalanche velocity profiles (21.875 RPM).	140
7.3.6	Beach sand avalanche velocity profiles (9.375 RPM).	141
7.3.7	Beach sand avalanche velocity profiles (15 RPM).	142
7.3.8	Beach sand avalanche velocity profiles (21.875 RPM).	143
7.3.9	Dimensionless layer thicknesses - comparison.	144
7.3.10	Areas of the ash.	145
7.3.11	Areas of the beach sand.	146
7.3.12	Collapse periodicity versus RPM (ash and beach).	147
7.3.13	Dynamic angles of friction.	148
7.4.1	Passing avalanches in ash.	149

7.6.2	Radial stripes in the pumice.	149
7.4.2	Passing avalanches in the beach sand.	150
7.5.1	Ash mass flux.	151
7.5.2	Beach sand mass flux.	152
7.6.1	Beach sand area - linear interpretation.	153
7.6.3	Axial segregation.	153
7.6.4	Radial segregation.	154
7.6.5	Raised region in the pumice.	155
8.2.1	Dimensionless layer thicknesses - wet.	159
8.2.2	Dynamic angle of friction, wet experiment.	160
8.3.1	Low water level behaviour.	161
8.3.2	Clean water region.	163
8.3.3	Early curved free surface onset.	164
8.3.4	Wet and dry cases comparison.	165
8.4.1	Forces on a single particle.	166
9.2.1	Flow regimes - ash.	172
9.2.2	Flow regimes - beach.	173
9.4.1	SECC area versus rotational velocity.	188
9.6.1	Mass flux imbalance demonstration.	197
A.3.1	Curved and undulating free surfaces.	253
A.4.1	Pumice low-density region.	258
B.1.1	Pumice jet stream example.	263

List of Tables

3.1	Consolidation stress.	43
3.2	Angle of repose.	55
3.3	Particulate densities.	58
3.4	The bulk densities, in kg m^{-3} to four significant figures, of the materials used in this study.	59
3.5	Speed verification.	60
4.1	Angle of internal friction, flow function, and cohesion	85
6.1	SECC attributes.	121
7.1	Material dilations.	139
8.1	Saturation Percentages	160
9.1	Material dilations (repeat).	176
9.2	Fluid/solid density ratios	180
9.3	SECC Attributes (repeat).	189